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# ALWAYS MY DAD

Author: Sharon Dennis Wyeth

Illustrator: Raúl Colón

Publisher: Apple Soup/Knopf

*In activities involving families, it is important to be sensitive to the family situations of all students. Some of the activities suggested here may need to be adapted.*

## THEME:

Families have many different configurations, but it's the people who make up a family that makes it unique.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

In the feature book, a girl, who after her parents divorce doesn't see her father very often, frequently thinks about him and treasures the time they have together.

LeVar joins a Family Day picnic and shares how he grew up in a single parent family. Viewers meet a one parent family, and see how these four children and father manage schedules, responsibilities and share lots of love. A boy who rarely hears from his father tells how the "Big Brother, Big Sister" program paired him with a special friend. This episode explores a delicate family issue in a positive way.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Pose the question, "What is a family?" Make a list of the children's ideas and formulate a definition.

Have students relate favorite activities they do with their fathers, other older male family members, or an older male family friend.

The little girl in the story had certain things that reminded her of her father whenever she saw them. Discuss with students what reminds them of their parents.

The children in the story participated in lots of summertime fun. Discuss the students' favorite summer activities.

Have students share affectionate or "pet" names their parents or grandparents call them that no one else uses.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Make a Venn diagram of the roles and responsibilities of mothers and fathers. Since the ideas will come from the students' own experiences and perceptions, there will likely be lively discussion about the unique nature of families.

Brainstorm a list of words that name family members (e.g., great-grandmother, cousin, stepfather, uncle, sister, etc.). Include synonyms on the list (e.g., father, dad, daddy, papa, etc.). Discuss the relationships of these family members.

Have students interview a dad (their own, an uncle, grandfather, family friend, etc.) regarding the great joys or moments and the difficult things about being a dad. Share the interview information in class.

Have students write a biography of their father (or stepfather, uncle, grandfather, family friend, a "famous" dad). Discuss the types of information usually found in a biography and ways they might find out what they need to know. Illustrate the biographies with drawings or photographs.

Involve the students in a survey of individual family members to determine their "favorites" in categories such as the following: food, game/toy, TV show, animal, book, and family activity. Prepare a survey sheet, with the categories written down the left side, for students to take home and complete by writing the names of family members across the top and each person's "favorite" in the intersecting boxes. Invite students to share their surveys in class and discuss ways that their families are alike and different.

Go to the playground or a nearby park (a grassy area is preferable) and participate in some activities such as those in the 'Family Day' picnic from the video. These activities might include: three-legged race; sack race; water balloon toss (students form two lines a few feet apart and toss a water balloon to their partner directly across from them; after each toss, they take a step back); spoon relay (team members balance an egg on a spoon and walk quickly across a designated distance to pass the spoon to the next team member); and others.

Obtain a copy of the book and have students examine the artistic technique used by the illustrator. Discuss how he might have achieved the "scratchy" effect. (According to a note in the book, he used watercolor, charcoal, colored pencils, and lithograph pencils, and etched the surface with tools including an empty ballpoint pen and a scratcher.) Have students draw a scene with crayons or colored pencils and experiment with the scratch technique, using a variety of tools to etch away some of the color.

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**RELATED THEMES:**

families  
intergenerational relationships  
summer season

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #89 — Through Moon And Stars And Night Skies  
Program #20 — A Chair For My Mother  
Program #58 — Little Nino's Pizzeria  
Program #22 — The Patchwork Quilt

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

*Always My Dad* is based on Sharon Dennis Wyeth's relationship with her own father and their summertime visits to her grandparents' farm. She is the author of several middle grade books and has worked as a voice teacher, family counselor, and writer for daytime television.

**ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

Raúl Colón's art ranges from puppet design to short animated films for television. His illustrations have appeared in several magazines and in the New York Times. *Always My Dad* is his first children's book. He lives in New York City with his wife and children.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

BOUNDLESS GRACE  
by Mary Hoffman, illus. by Caroline Binch (Dial)  
TAXI! TAXI!  
by Cari Best, illus. by Dale Gottlieb (Little, Brown)

THE PERFECT SPOT  
by Robert J. Blake (Putnam & Grosset)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

DADDY, DADDY, BE THERE  
by Candy Dawson Boyd, illus. by Floyd Cooper (Philomel)

THE PAINTER  
by Peter Catalanotto (Orchard)

HOLDING ONTO SUNDAY  
by Kathryn Galbraith (McElderry)

WHEN WE MARRIED GARY  
by Anna Grossnickle Hines (Greenwillow)

FAMILIES: A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY, COMMITMENT, AND LOVE  
by Aylette Jenness (Houghton Mifflin)

LIKE JAKE AND ME  
by Mavis Jukes, illus. by Lloyd Bloom (Knopf)

IF I'D KNOWN THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW  
by Reeve Lindbergh, illus. by Kimberly Bulcken Root (Viking)

THE DADDY BOOK  
by Ann Morris, photos by Ken Heyman (Silver Press)

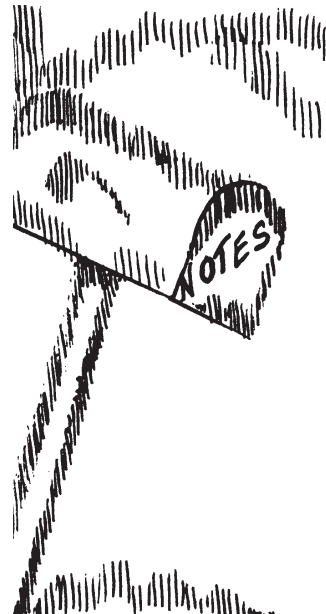
FAMILIES ARE DIFFERENT  
by Nina Pellegrini (Holiday House)

MY OL' MAN  
by Patricia Polacco (Philomel)

MY FATHER'S HANDS  
by Joanne Ryder, illus. by Mark Graham (Morrow)

TODAY I'M GOING FISHING WITH MY DAD  
by N. Sharp, illus. by Chris Demarest (Boyd's Mills)

DADDY PLAYED MUSIC FOR THE COWS  
by Maryann Weidt, illus. by Henri Sorensen (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)



Directed by Mark Mannucci. With LeVar Burton, B.J. Crosby. This episode of "Reading Rainbow" teaches a lesson about family. LeVar Burton reminisces about his childhood with his mother and two sisters. His parents were divorced when he was eight leaving him without a father. In this episode, we visit with children that come from different types of family structures--not all of which are traditional. Always My Dad is an Emmy-nominated song that Lisa wrote and sang in the finale of the Lil' Starmaker competition in the episode "A Star is Torn". She wrote it at the last minute because her father went over to help the competition. The music was written by Alf Clausen and the lyrics by Carolyn Omine. It is part of the twenty-eighth track on the album The Simpsons: Testify. The song was nominated for a Primetime Emmy award for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Music and Lyrics in 2005. It lost to My dad stopped yelling now but I'm still traumatized about the times he yelled at me. My parents told me that I was a sensitive child when I was born. I cried a lot even more than my siblings. My dad usually yells when me and my siblings mess